Persistent Security, Then Development

Captain Jonathan Pan, U.S. Army

"It may be time to focus American national efforts on a different approach—a collective approach involving all elements of national power—an approach focused on exportation of security rather than projection of military combat power. At the center of this proposal is the necessity to establish a reasonable level of security in such a way that all aspects of national power can be applied near-simultaneously . . . "

—General William Wallace, U.S. Army, Retired

IT IS THE frequent experience of coalition forces in southern Afghanistan that security precedes development. Nonetheless, the debate between security and development has become akin to the chicken or the egg debate. It is time to unscramble this puzzle. Persistent security must be established before development can begin.

A field grade commander operating in Afghanistan effectively captured the gist of the issue: "They want us to Sun Tzu the enemy with everything besides committing forces, but it doesn't work." Evoking the name Sun Tzu, an ancient Chinese general, strategist, and author of *The Art of War*, suggests that one does not necessarily need to fight to secure victory: "Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting."[1]

Insightful strategists understand that while some stratagems are timeless, others are not. Some apply to all situations; some do not. In the case of southern Afghanistan, where there are areas with substantial numbers of enemy fighters ideologically determined to return the Taliban to power, it will take far more than the promise of development projects to effect their return to civil society and their reconciliation with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA). The following process advocates persistent security, followed by stabilization, followed by development. However, while persistent security *precedes* development, a good counterinsurgent *plans for* development and all other lines of operations throughout the process. Furthermore, development can actually improve security, but this happens only if persistent security is first established.

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PHOTO: U.S. Soldiers stop to rest next to a canal as they conduct a dismounted patrol during Operation Helmand Spider in Badula Qulp, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 17 February 2010. (U.S. Air Force photo by TSGT Efren Lopez)

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Persistent security is an approach introduced by retired General William Wallace to establish a "reasonable level of security in such a way that all aspects of national power can be applied near simultaneously."[2] Units may achieve persistent security through offensive and defensive operations during their rotations; however, once they have successfully conducted such initiative-creating operations, many do not follow-up with timely stability operations to retain the initiative. Therefore, the next unit arrives and, before conducting stability operations, it has to reestablish a security environment that has already been purchased, quite literally, with blood, sweat, and tears. Persistent security is the sufficient condition for stability operations and, in turn, stability operations are required to sustain persistent security.

For example, abandoned or ruined schools litter the landscape of southern Afghanistan. There is the often-told example of the provincial reconstruction team that confidently builds a village school. During the celebratory ribbon cutting ceremony the provincial reconstruction team commander, the battle-space commander, and a handful of Afghan officials are all smiling for public relations pictures. That very night the Taliban slips into town, deposits a few well-placed night letters, and, sure enough, on the next day no teachers or students are present at the school. A few sheets of A4 European letter-size paper effectively undermined and embarrassed the provincial reconstruction team, the military unit, and the GIRoA in one fell swoop. The lesson of the story is simple, inescapable, and fundamental: persistent security must be present at the moment development begins. The corollary, of course, is that one must have planned development activities (i.e., have shaped the environment) so that they can be executed as soon as persistent security is established.

Stabilization versus Development

There are significant differences between stabilization and development. According to the Department of Defense, stability operations "help establish order that advances United States interests and values. The immediate goal often is to provide the local populace with security, restore

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Afghan National Army and International Security Assistance Forces rest during an early morning dismounted patrol supporting Operation Mostarak, Badula Qulp, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 19 February 2010.

essential services, and meet humanitarian needs."[3] Development can be measured by the increase in quality of life for the average citizen. There are multiple spheres of development. Governance, healthcare, education, gender equality, infrastructure, economics, human rights, and the environment are common examples. All of those elements of development are necessary for a self-sustaining Afghanistan, but few, if any, are achieved without the precursor of stability.

In many military circles, stability operations are an uncomfortable topic. Part of this discomfort is due to the lack of formalized stability operations training available to units in predeployment. Given the difficulties most military units have in executing them, some even claim that stability operations are not a military task. Nevertheless, the Department of Defense is the only instrument of national power with a responsive and substantial stabilization budget in the form of the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP), whose funding in Fiscal Year 2010 amounted to $1.2 billion. In southern Afghanistan, senior decision makers have realized the necessity of a "CERP machine" due to the paucity of spending: only $37 million has been committed for execution as of late May 2010. However, blind spending and haphazard projects have to be avoided. The military lacks the expertise necessary for stabilization, to include its Civil Affairs Corps, which has been torn apart by frequent deployments and inadequate training. Many civil affairs companies coming into southern Afghanistan report that they have never received training on how to administer CERP. The answer to these difficulties is to tap into civilian expertise resident in the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). A framework common to both civilians as well as the military must be established and used for such unified, synchronous efforts to occur.

The current attempt to achieve this unity is the "tactical conflict assessment and planning framework" (TCAPF). USAID recently created this framework, and in the past few years, the Army has made the TCAPF part of its doctrine, as confirmed by its inclusion in Field Manual 3-07, *Stability Operations*.[4] The TCAPF conceptual model identifies three main factors that foster instability:

- Grievances (frustrated people).
- Key actors with means and motivations (Taliban).
- Windows of opportunity (presidential elections).

The underlying notion is simple: achieve stability by removing the sources of instability.

While the intellectual concept of the framework is solid, two prerequisites for successful practical application are predeployment training and total battalion and brigade staff buy-in.

One problem with TCAPF is that its trainers advocate that units adopt it as their only targeting methodology, in lieu of the other doctrinal targeting and planning processes (e.g., the Military Decision Making Process and the "decide, detect, deliver, and assess" process). After adopting and operationalizing TCAPF in Afghanistan, my battalion commander, a former corps-level targeting officer, described it as "an incredible assessment tool, but no substitute for our traditional targeting methodology." Another problem is that TCAPF lures staffs to focus in on one source of instability at a time, when the truth on the ground is that there are many sources of instability at the local level, and they must be targeted simultaneously. Finally, tactical units may not have the capability to target the source of instability. A State Department official once quipped to me that the "local" source of instability across all of southern Afghanistan is Quetta, Pakistan.

A complementary method to achieve civil-military synergy is to assign a senior civilian representative to the brigade combat team. My unit was fortunate to have a State Department foreign service officer assigned through the first two-thirds of our deployment. The officer had two roles. He

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Soldiers from the 2d Infantry Division keep a lookout in the fields of Jeleran during a combat patrol in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, 15 December 2009.

served as the brigade's traditional political advisor, accompanying the brigade commander to key leader engagements and meetings with our NATO and GIRoA partners. Even more critical was his role as the integrator of the nonmilitary instruments of national power into brigade plans and operations. The senior civilian representative regularly tapped into his rolodex of contacts to bring agricultural, rule of law, governance, and other experts into the discussion to solve complex problem sets. Senior civilian representatives at the brigade level seem to be a waning trend in southern Afghanistan. After serving 14 months in Afghanistan, our senior representative returned to the United States. He was replaced briefly by another foreign service officer, who was quickly reassigned to another province, leaving the brigade without a senior representative for our final four months in combat. It does not appear that any of the four U.S. brigades deploying to Regional Command South this summer will be assigned senior civilian representatives.

Some development organizations believe that providing the local population with schools, hospitals, and money will generally lead to better security as well. If one follows that line of thought, it is certainly conceivable that development could occur side by side with offensive and defensive operations. After all, those are security-achieving activities. However, many experts disagree with that argument. Amitai Etzioni, a leading American intellectual, thinks the argument that "development is essential for security and hence must precede it, is erroneous because without basic security, development cannot take place."[5]

I will argue the following sequence of events:

- First, the unit conducts offensive and defensive operations to regain the initiative and establish persistent security.
- Second, the unit conducts stability operations to maintain the initiative and sustain persistent security.
- Third, when persistent security is sustainable, development starts.

We must not neglect development experts while we execute offensive and defensive operations. In fact, *planning* for all phases of this framework (or shaping and clearing the environment) *must* occur throughout the whole sequence so that development can "hit the ground running" once persistent security is established. Regrettably, there are numerous cases in southern Afghanistan where persistent security

was established but development was never realized, all because adequate planning did not occur or scarce development resources were wasted in areas that did not have the level of persistent security needed to allow success.

Regaining the Initiative

The commander of the 5th Brigade, 2d Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team), Colonel Harry D. Tunnell, deliberately entered areas that previous coalition force units had avoided. Consequently, counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in select districts of Kandahar Province (for example, Spin Boldak and Maiwand) have just finished their first continuous year with coalition force presence. Therefore, judging these operations as a continuation of a series of operations that has stretched for years would be shortsighted. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates seemed to agree as he considered Afghanistan to have had two wars. The first war was in 2001, and the coalition prevailed. The second war started in late 2005, and its outcome is still very much in doubt. According to Mr. Gates, "the United States really has gotten its head into this conflict in Afghanistan, as far as I'm concerned, only in the last year."[6]

The fact that some units in southern Afghanistan are entering new territory makes it difficult to fully comply with the International Security Assistance Force commander's COIN guidance. As he has stated, "Strive to focus 95 percent of our energy on the 95 percent of the population that deserves and needs our support."[7] The best way to accomplish his guidance is to live among the population in combat outposts, making daily access to the population possible. This reasonable notion is complicated by the fact that limited engineer resources in southern Afghanistan cannot keep pace with the demand for many new combat outposts. These outposts are in accordance with the International Security Assistance Force COIN operations guidance.

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These facts should sound a note of caution to those who wish to promote development in areas that do not have persistent security. For instance, a primary area needing development in Kandahar is the Arghandab River Valley. As important as this area is to Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF), coalition forces, and insurgent forces, the problem remains that parts of the Arghandab are still being contested, and persistent security has yet to be established.

Despite remarkable kinetic efforts on the part of coalition forces, those with a little knowledge of the area's history will not be surprised to know that the issue is still in doubt. According to an article in *Small Wars Journal*, "Armies from at least three countries have ventured into the Arghandab River Valley: British, followed by Soviets, and more recently Canadians; all were unsuccessful."[8] At present, the first successful unit to contest and hold the Arghandab was the 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, which entered the valley in August 2009. In what some might consider a counterintuitive operational move, the 2d Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, replaced them in December 2009 instead of augmenting them. An often-heard argument supporting the presence of more than one battalion was expressed by Carl Forsberg:

> The regiment's experience in Arghandab has demonstrated that a battalion-sized unit is insufficient to reverse the Taliban's entrenched control over the strategically critical Arghandab District in the time available.[9]

In the event that the whole district tips decisively toward ANSF, coalition forces, and the national government, stability operations can start and development can follow. Having the tactical and political patience to establish persistent security leads to a more stable and enduring peace, and ultimately a self-sustaining secure environment.[10]

The *only* way to gain the initiative in areas with limited prior coalition forces and government presence is to conduct offensive and defensive operations. Yet, COIN has become so indoctrinated that such operations are highly scrutinized. A series of geographically and temporally disconnected successful COIN anecdotes—building a retaining wall in one village turned the whole village

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to the coalition or drinking three cups of tea with a fence-sitting tribal leader turned his tribe to the coalition—has some senior decision makers convinced that combat should be avoided at all costs. Recent suicidal attacks on Afghanistan's largest bases demonstrate that there are still ideologically driven men who are willing to fight to the death. Building retaining walls and drinking cups of tea can only do so much.

Offensive and defensive operations should not be constrained or needlessly pressured by a timetable, but should proceed with shaping, clearing, holding, and building activities across the security, governance, and development lines of operations. All these ambitious COIN activities must be done with the GIRoA and ANSF leading the coalition of international civil-military organizations as often as possible.

Maintaining the Initiative

Stability operations should start by enhancing traditional systems that worked. For example, instead of entering the temptingly easy but actually murky business of "well digging" and "*karez*-cleaning" (*karezes* are ancient underground irrigation systems), units should find and engage the village or community *mirab bashi* (water master) to see what has traditionally worked, and start from there. Kai Wegerich, a development researcher, writes—

> There is a danger that externally funded projects, involving either construction of intakes or maintenance work, might weaken collective action within the canal communities or increase already existing inequity in maintenance work requirements…It is recommended that prior to rehabilitation of intakes the communities agree on the future sharing of water and of maintenance tasks. These agreements should be presented to the irrigation departments, which then would have the responsibility to enforce them.[11]

In areas where water is an issue, grievances usually arise due to water management and distribution issues rather than lack of wells or clogged *karezes*. Digging more wells lowers the water table and does not always alleviate the grievance. In some cases, there are legitimate reasons to dig a well or clean a *karez*. Whatever the case may be, units tend to find that addressing most grievance-related issues through the traditional tribal mechanisms of *shuras* and *jirgas* will provide solutions:

> The *shura* and *jirga* are both traditional Afghan conflict resolution and community decision-making bodies. The main difference between the two, according to scholars, is that a *shura* meets in response to a specific need, especially during wartime, whereas a *jirga* is more egalitarian and meets on a consistent basis—which is why the *jirga* has become a national political structure, whereas the shura has not.[12]

These decision making bodies need to be engaged prior to most, but not all, activities. These engagement processes take time, but sometimes the "by, with, and through" concept can be taken to the extreme as time is running out. Nevertheless, if a community is vested in a particular activity or project, there is a significantly higher chance that they will protect it.

For example, a survey conducted by Human Rights Watch found that schools built by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development's National Solidarity Program were less likely than other schools to be targets of Taliban vandalism and destruction.[13] Because such mobilized communities elect their own community development councils to identify, plan, manage, build, and monitor these schools, they tend to survive better. The dynamic demonstrates the "sweat equity" concept rather than the utility of the highly regarded program, which has been silent and absent for the last year in Kandahar province. Furthermore, some experts caution that these councils may be good for attracting and administering donor contributions of funding and projects, but they are "not necessar[ily] equipped to resolve inter- or intra-community disputes."[14] Others take criticism of the program a step further and assert it does not work at all in southern Afghanistan due to poor security and widespread corruption. Ultimately, upcoming district council elections will negate the necessity for an artificially created system existing side by side with

a constitutionally established system: the district council. Despite these upcoming changes, both the *shura* and *jirga* system remain viable processes for dealing with internal community and local issues. Meanwhile, project management and administration would be better placed in the hands of the elected district councils, which will be the face of Afghan governance. Using *shuras*, *jirgas*, and, ideally, district councils (district elections were not held in the last elections), local communities will provide their own "sweat equity" and district officials will put their names on the line, which makes it more likely they will defend their projects with their lives. This is the definition of maintaining the initiative. The combination of ANSF and coalition forces security and local community investment sustains security until more civilian-led, sophisticated, and ambitious development activities and projects enter the scene.

Development

Development should only begin when persistent security is established and the area stabilized. In September 2009, the district development *jirga* of Arghandab District, just northwest of Kandahar City, consisted of about 10 to 12 village elders. Identifying the elders' village on a map led to the discovery that *all* the elders came from the very eastern edge of the district. Coalition leaders informed the district leader that there could be no development until there was a truly representative *jirga* with representatives coming from across the district. The district leader acknowledged the lack of representation, but in the absence of district-wide security, he could not muster the requisite representative *shura*. However, after only two months of ANSF and NATO clearance operations, a level of persistent security resulted in more elders attending the *shura*. At the beginning of November 2009, over 50 elders showed up when the provincial governor visited the district. This increased participation is a metric to measure persistent security and indicated that the time was right for development.

U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, states, "Military forces can perform civilian tasks but often not as well as the civilian agencies with people trained in those skills. Further, military forces performing civilian tasks are not performing military tasks."[15] However, with persistent security obtained in the Arghandab District, other instruments of national power, such as USAID, could safely and consistently bring to the area their multimillion dollar programs and projects. For example,

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U.S. Soldiers patrol in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, 15 December 2009.

the Afghanistan Voucher for Increased Productive Agriculture Plus Program, which has a budget of $240 million, was introduced into the Arghandab River Valley. This program is widely considered by many in the military, including select commanders of the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade in Helmand as well as select stabilization officers of Task Force Stryker in Kandahar, to be the top-performing USAID program.

With a sizable budget, quick and flexible funding, and proactive staff, the program provides—

- Immediate cash for work programs to decrease unemployment.
- Small grants for farming cooperatives giving them the equipment, saplings, seed, and fertilizer they need.
- Agricultural voucher programs to "wean" farmers from poppy production.
- Training to improve agricultural output through simple techniques and knowledge previously unknown to local farmers.

In Kandahar alone, as of late May 2010, 40,555 fighting-age males have been hired, 57,046 vouchers redeemed, 82 small grants signed or disbursed, and 28,079 farmers trained.

Success along either or both the security and development line of operations is not enough. Governance plays an equally important role. Andrew Wilder, a research director at the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University, writes,

> In an ethnically and tribally divided society like Afghanistan, aid can easily generate jealousy and ill will by inadvertently helping to consolidate the power of some tribes or factions at the expense of others—often pushing rival groups into the arms of the Taliban.[16]

Development activities in the absence of good governance can actually lead to situational deterioration. `

In the Arghandab District, this lesson was heeded and additional effort went to establishing good governance. The results have been rewarding. For example, at first, the Alokozai tribe questioned their leaders' support of the government and coalition forces. Arghandab has a population estimated at 115,000 and the Alokozai tribe makes up 60 percent of that. In terms of wealth and power, the Alokozais had once been one of the big four tribes of southern Afghanistan, the Popalzai, the Barakzai, the Mohammadzai (a subtribe of the Barakzai), being the others. However, since the 2001 invasion, the Alokozai tribe began to lose its significance. President Karzai belongs to the Popalzai tribe, and Gul Agha Sherzai, former Governor of Kandahar, belongs to the Barakzai tribe. The provincial governor and the Kandahar City mayor are Mohammadzai. These tribes gain tremendous wealth and power from coalition force contracts while the other tribes see little benefit. Consequently, while establishing persistent security, coalition forces shared many cups of tea with the Alokozai tribal leaders. After achieving adequate security and starting development, the Alokozai leaders began making decisions on the what and where of development projects for their people. The emphasis on the governance lines of the operations permitted the successful establishment of the conditions necessary for this previously affected tribe to reenter the governance dialogue. The three lines of the operation are security, governance, and development.

Synchronization of effort is the solution to many of the challenges of development. Without thoughtful movement along all three main lines of operations, development can disrupt stability and jeopardize persistent security. In the recent history of Afghanistan, both civilian and military entities have failed at stability and development. Perhaps the most glaring example of military failure is indiscriminate distribution of humanitarian assistance, which should be distributed for humanitarian reasons, period. Very often, well-intentioned units think that humanitarian assistance is primarily a means for winning the population's "hearts and minds," and distribute it without reference to the population's actual need. An anonymous writer in the *Small Wars Journal* wrote, "Hearts and Minds is a wonderful name for a teen romance novel, but I've always thought it to be a poor name for a counterinsurgency concept."[17] During a regional governor's conference in August 2009, a provincial governor requested that coalition forces stop distributing humanitarian assistance, because it was creating an image of him as a government official who could not provide for his constituents.

An example of a civilian-led effort gone amiss involves a provincial reconstruction team that decided to distribute humanitarian assistance in 2008 during Eid-Akhtar (breaking the fast) in observance

of *zakat*, which calls for charity to poor and needy Muslims. The team wanted to distribute humanitarian assistance to the 200 poorest families in the city. What started as a worthy and noble effort turned out to be anything but. All of the humanitarian assistance ended up in the hands of the town's local powerbroker who distributed the items to his powerbase, not those with the greatest need. Sometimes even the best attempts to win over hearts and minds can fail.

The Way Forward

There is a clear, logical sequence of events that units should execute in the shape-clear-hold-build-transition continuum. The first step—shape and clear—is to conduct offensive and defensive operations to gain or regain the initiative and establish persistent security. The second step—hold and build—is to conduct stability operations to maintain the initiative and maintain persistent security. The third and final step—transition—is to support properly planned and executed civilian-led developmental efforts leading to self-sustaining, transferable security.

Proper planning must occur throughout the process so that once persistent security is established, the initiatives of governance and development are not lost. Long-term development combined with Afghan-led security is the key to transitioning the war to the Afghans. Once persistent security is established, development must occur alongside governance for efforts to be sustainable. ***MR***

NOTES

1. See <www.chinapage.com/sunzi-e.html>.
2. William Wallace and Edmund J. Degen, "Persistent Security," *RUSI 152:4* (August 2007): 26.
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4. Field Manual (FM) 3-07, *Stability Operations*, Appendix D, "Interagency Conflict Assessment Overview" (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO]), D-7.
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17. Vegetius, "The Myth of Hearts and Minds," *Small Wars Journal* (December 2009).